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ABSTRACT

Physical education and athletic programs are usually considered expendable parts of the American lifestyle. Nearly half the adults in the United States do not exercise at all, and of those that do, many indulge in their favorite sport only once or twice a month. Although America seems to be a sports-conscious nation, the majority of the population are spectators rather than active participants. A demand for equal time for health, physical education, and recreation needs to be made. However, there should first be a change in attitude concerning sports. Why should the national favorites continue to be football, baseball, and soccer when they have been found to not be conducive to physical fitness and health? Besides being poor body builders, competitive sports have recently been considered drains on the spirit because competition makes more losers than winners. There is now a growing movement in American physical education which emphasizes lifetime sports rather than the usual team sports learned in school. This movement is exemplified by the increasing number of local recreational athletes, creation of new family games, booming interest in dance, Eastern martial arts, and other disciplines. With a change in attitude, people can have both sound bodies and sound minds. (JS)

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ATLANTIC CITY, MARCH 14, 1975

Re-Visioning Sports, Physical Education and the Body

I want to tell you how much I appreciate your asking me, a latecomer to your field, to meet with you tonight in Atlantic City, and to share with you a few of my thoughts concerning health, physical education and recreation at this moment in time. The matter of timing is significant, for it is becoming increasingly clear with every passing day that we are fast approaching the end of one way of life and the beginning of another, that we are currently engaged in a historical transformation towards something still uncertain, deeply troubling to our present view of things, filled with obvious peril and unpredictable opportunity.

Throughout our history, the matters that are of particular concern to those of you here tonight have always played a key role in determining the national character and destiny. In this difficult and exciting period of transformation, I'm convinced that these matters--sports and games, the education and apprehension of the body--will play an even more crucial role.

We have indeed come to a moment when time-tested remedies for social and personal ills no longer seem to work as they should, when every solution tends to become part of the problem--

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--when national leaders and their expert advisers seem almost totally confused about the course of things. ("In my 34 years as a businessman," Henry Ford II was recently quoted as saying, "I have never before felt so uncertain and troubled about the future of both my country and my company.")

--when it becomes clearer all the time that we can't much longer go on heedlessly burning fuel, selfishly exploiting nature and other people, and greedily producing and consuming ever-more-trivial goods and services

--when we can no longer deny that significant changes are called for concerning how we behave towards others, what we value and how we choose to live our lives.

It's against this background that I come to you to talk about re-visioning sports, physical education and the body. And I want to ask for your patience and indulgence at the very start. For I'm sure that much of what I have to say is already quite obvious to you.

No one should have to stand on a public platform and argue that a well-conditioned, tingling, fully-alive body is the very foundation of good health and a good life. Yet a national survey reveals that only 55 percent of American adults report they do any exercise at all; and, of those who do, the majority name "walking" as their exercise. The favorite participatory sport of American adults, according to this authoritative survey, is bowling; but nearly one-half of the bowlers participate in their sport "less than once a month." And it's still all-too-common to hear supposedly intelligent people repeating that old saw: "Whenever I feel the urge to

exercise coming on, I lie down until it passes over."

No one should have to point out that body and mind are not really separate, that thinking and moving are merely different aspects of a single unified field, that Albert Einstein first got his Special Theory of Relativity from a feeling in his muscles. Yet the old mind-body dualism continues to misinform intellectuals and athletes alike (though there should be no necessary distinction between the two), and you can still ask professors in liberal arts colleges about their physical education departments and get only blank looks in return.

No one should have to inform educators and media people about The New Physical Education approach sponsored by the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education and Recreation. Yet I must regretfully inform you that no media person with whom I've spoken to date has been able to bring it to mind. And that's not the worst of it. Last November, I testified before a large state educational reform commission and learned that not one of the 35 commissioners present had ever heard of this pioneering, marvelously-appropriate, desperately-needed reform movement in the education of the body.

No one should have to get up in public and make the obvious point that physical education is an essential part of all education, from pre-school through the most advanced graduate degree program, from learning to fly a plane to learning to understand great literature. Yet, in many communities across the United States, physical education and/or athletic programs are considered expendable, and at this very moment are falling

victim to budget cuts. Yes, as incredible as it may seem, the education of the body, far too often, is still considered a "frill".

So maybe it is necessary that we rise to point out what is already apparent, to argue for what really needs no argument and to repeat what is obvious--and that we do it again and again, before every possible audience, on every possible occasion, until what is obvious becomes inescapable.

I ask you to consider for a moment that the current public lack of knowledge about the true importance of physical education coincides with the greatest sports boom in the history of the planet

--when professional football, via the slow-motion instant replay, has become an art form that rivals ballet

--when the New York Times devotes more space to sports than to art, books, education and the theater combined

--when the last three Presidents, armed with nuclear weapons, have described their actions in current sports terminology

--when Olympic-minded coaches devise the most ingenious computer analyses of performance and use higher mathematics to squeeze the last half-foot or half-second out of the favored top fraction of one percent of our athletes.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not going to attack competitive athletic programs in high schools and colleges. I'm not going to attack our spectacular television sports per se. There's great beauty and glory and a glimpse of human transcendence in the sporting events presented so skillfully on our

networks of communications.

But I do think that we must somehow insist on equal time for the health, physical education and recreation of all the people--of our children, of you and me. Because, you see, the traditional team sports that now dominate so many of our athletic departments can't really do the job of making us a nation of athletic participators. Only a small percentage of our children can profit from the varsity programs that often preoccupy high school and college departments. And only a tiny percentage of our population-at-large ends up playing these sports after they leave school. The chief function of our mainline competitive team sports, unfortunately, lies in creating spectators by the millions.

Then, too, I must add that some of these sports are not very good for fitness and health. Softball or baseball, in spite of their precision and elegance, give players a lot of practice in sitting and "talking it up". Football is a vivid sport that may be hazardous to your health. Dr. George Sheehan, a leading authority on sports medicine, has said that the best way to view football is as "an act between consenting adults". Actually, as Dr. Sheehan and others have pointed out, football and baseball players are generally not in very good shape. "The life expectancy of football players is significantly shorter than that of their classmates, and their tendency to become obese in later years is greater than usual." It always gives me pause to consider the fact that thousands, literally thousands, of amateur runners in their 40s, 50s and 60s can easily beat the average professional football player over

distances of a mile or more.

If you're really concerned about the best physical conditioning for our population, you'd probably enlist all schoolchildren in dance programs. Doctors at the Institute of Sports Medicine and Trauma at the Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City have made a study of the physical demands placed on individuals in various strenuous activities. As a part of the study, they have rated a number of these activities in terms of ten categories--strength, endurance, body type, flexibility, coordination, speed, agility, balance, intelligence and creativity. The results will come as no surprise to afficianadoés of the dance. When the ratings were added up, ballet emerged as the most demanding--above basketball, soccer and football, high above baseball. You may do what you will with these findings.

As for the competitive aspects of the present sports boom, I think the only real problem lies in the matter of emphasis. Competition, in its proper context, can be a delight. It can and does add zest to games and to life. But when it becomes codified, institutionalized and overblown, it threatens our entire sports establishment. And when the competitive ladder becomes more important than ethical balance, when winning at all costs becomes more important than how you play the game, then our nation itself, as we have seen in the Watergate tragedy, faces a real and ultimate danger.

It's sometimes said that constant hot competition makes winners. This argument is, at best, half true. It makes non-winners, too--generally many more non-winners than winners. In

fact, when competition reaches the present Super Bowl-type intensity, the argument becomes altogether false. Over a period of 13 years, a certain major league baseball team had the best overall won-lost record in its league, including five straight second-place finishes. During that period, the team came to be characterized by fan and sportswriter alike as "losers". For five straight years, a certain professional football team won its division championship and then was eliminated either in the play-offs or, finally, in the Super Bowl itself. And what was said of that fine football team during this period of unprecedented winning? They "couldn't win the big ones". They were, you see, just losers.

In this Alice-in-Wonderland world we have fallen into, there is only one thing that really counts--that is, winning the Super Bowl, being Number One. All else is empty, meaningless. And even after you've just won the Super Bowl--<u>especially</u> after you've just won the Super Bowl--<u>there's always next year</u>. So you see, this way of thinking makes us--all of us--into eventual losers.

We only have to look back into history to see where the mindless worship of hot competition can lead us. The ancient Olympics, under the encroachment of professionalism, with its demand for winning at all costs, gradually fell prey to bribery and other forms of corruption. By the time of Alexander the Great, Olympic athletes were generally held in disrepute. Under Roman domination, the Games themselves were disgraced. The emperor Nero, for example, fell out of his chariot twice during one Olympic race and finally had to give up. In an act of irony

appropriate to the downfall of ancient ideals, the judges then awarded him the olive crown of victory.

We have by no means sunk so low--but we might well face up to the worst aspects of our own situation where the sports boom is concerned:

Our current overemphasis on competitive team sports is making us a nation of weaklings.

Our current overemphasis on "winning" is making us a nation of losers.

I do not think the present Super Bowl-type madness represents the wave of the future, but rather the last desperate gasp of a dying way of life. The final period in any evolutionary line of development--of a biological species, an artistic movement or a society--is often marked by convolutions, overspecialization and other bizarre extremes. (Remember the dinosaurs?) We might bear in mind that the current public glorification of winning at all costs came to the fore during a war we did not win. Sermons by top corporate executives on hot competition as the American Way were being directed at the younger generation during a period when many of these same executives were making every effort to get around the federal regulations against price-fixing and illegal cooperation among corporate "competitors". The use of competitive sports terminology by a national administration reached an all-time high just before the nation learned how misleading and disastrous "game plans" and "enemy lists" can be.

Perhaps the lesson in all this is a very old one. It's not, "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing," but a

much older, wiser, more practical precept: "It isn't whether you win or lose, but how you play the game that really counts."

I'm happy to say that, beneath the Super Bowl hullabaloo, other games are being played--and played very well. Another movement--underpublicized, underfunded--is well underway--a movement that can transform our attitude towards sports and physical education, and help us create a way of life that is harmonious, humane and appropriate to the challenge of the present and future.

This movement is exemplified by The New Physical Education that I have already mentioned, with its emphasis on Lifetime Sports rather than the usual team sports in secondary school, Movement Education in elementary school and, in addition, individualized instruction and the creation of a strong self-concept all along the way. This program makes such good sense that it is almost universally accepted, once people hear about it. And I'm convinced that Americans are going to hear about it in the months and years ahead, for it is most assuredly an idea whose time has come. A major chapter in my forthcoming book, The Ultimate Athlete, is devoted to this subject, and the chapter has been adapted for use as a cover story in The Atlantic Monthly. And this, to be sure, is only the beginning. The American people, once they know the whole story, aren't likely to go on choosing specialized sports for a few talented athletes at the expense of a New Physical Education that can make every child a winner.

This movement is also exemplified by the growing army of joggers, hikers, swimmers and cyclists who are becoming increas-

ingly knowledgable on the benefits and joys of fine cardio-vascular conditioning. It boggles my mind to think that there are still instructors who punish children by making them run laps. When more and more people of all ages are initiated into the joys of running, that old system will itself be boggled.

The movement is exemplified by ever-increasing legions of recreational athletes who turn away from their television sets to the pleasures of the courts, the lakes and streams and fields and waves and trails.

It is exemplified by experimenters who are now creating New Games for the whole family, games with such unexpected and delightful names as Yogi Tag, New Frisbie, Infinity Volleyball, Boffing, Mating, and Circle Football--games in which everyone is on the "varsity", and everyone plays.

It is exemplified by the booming interest in dance, and the Eastern martial arts, yogas and other disciplines, in which, at best, the body, mind and spirit are seen as unified, and in which the movements of the body are seen as joining us to the harmony of the universe itself.

It is exemplified by a new, holistic approach to medicine that views the conventional definition of "health"--absence of disease--as merely the starting point on the journey towards good health. So many aspects of our present way of life turn us towards sickness. You only have to look at the commercials on television network news to see the face of dis-ease. And the solution offered seems to lie, like much else in the society, in something you consume--yet another pill or capsule or tonic or laxative or spray--something to accept passively; never mind

that you're sinking down into a life of lethargy and nagging discomfort, into what Dr. Rene Dubos calls "submerged potential illness".

According to conservative estimates, more than 50 percent of all hospital beds are occupied by people whose conditions are associated with the abuse of alcohol, tobacco or the automobile. This is surely a reflection of our negative, pathology-oriented policy towards health, and our stressful, unsatisfactory way of life. When a person starts to move into the largely unexplored territory of good health, and begins to experience what it feels like to be fully alive, such abuse will be simply unthinkable. The reduction of civilized stress and discontent that goes along with good health will greatly reduce the incidence of degenerative diseases such as hypertension, ulcers, colitis, and perhaps many other diseases as well. Should the good health movement take hold, we may be confronted with nothing worse than a crisis in empty hospital beds and bankrupt pharmaceutical firms.

The notion of good health is indeed central to everything we are meeting here to discuss. For it involves good nutrition, good air and water, good posture and breathing, good physical conditioning and movement, good relationships with nature and other people, good livelihood, a good moral climate, a good community, good goals and good balance of body, mind and spirit. It involves, obviously, not just changes in medical science and administration, but changes in the way we live.

In recent centuries, and especially in recent decades, we've been preoccupied with harnessing more and more energy,

expanding physical frontiers, exploiting nature and other people, and building a magnificent man-made environment on this planet. By and large, however, we've settled for a pathetically low definition of human possibilities. We've concentrated on doing and ignored being. We've put our minds and talents to questions involving the Gross National Product, but have hardly given a thought to the question of how it feels to be alive.

Now we approach the last days of the expansionist era. We've run out of physical frontiers, and have begun to learn something about the limits of materialism. We've discovered that Cowboy Economics are doomed. Through strenuous and mostly misguided efforts, we can probably heat up the economy a few more times, but the end of automatic affluence is clearly in sight. The bullet-biting that various political leaders keep refering to actually involves (who among them will have the courage to say it plainly?) accepting a more modest and more humane material standard of living. This is especially true for those on the more affluent end of the economic scale, for there can be no peaceful, positive transformation without social justice.

But please look again to see what it is we're giving up. The current quality of life with its frantic consumption, hectic movement, pollution, stress and dis-ease may seem a small loss indeed against the rewards of a new, fully-awakened existence. Putting aside the distractions of forced consumption and manufactured wants, we can get on with the business of realizing the enormous human potential. Turning from the adventures of

the gun and the highway, we can enjoy the adventures of the body and spirit. As for great enterprises and great risks to challenge our courage, there are more than enough waiting for us in the coming years. The winning of the West will seem pale in comparison.

The key question in all of this, it seems to me, is, "How does it feel to be alive?" This is what really determines the quality of our existence, not the size of our GNP, the horsepower of our cars or the height of our buildings. Thus. your theme for this year's convention, "Come Alive in '75," can be taken as more than simply a slogan; it is precisely the kind of guidance we need for the challenges and adventures that lie ahead. As we enter a new age, we must look also for a New Era of the Body, of the fully-aware, fully-alive body/mind/spirit. Without a sense of aliveness, without the joy of unconditional <u>being</u>, of graceful movement and good health, we may continue to long for a glut of consumer products and so-called creature comforts, of easy wealth and the stress, degeneration and dis-ease that so often accompanies it. We may long for what is inappropriate and maladaptive while failing to grasp the opportunity of a lifetime. For if this is to be an Era of the Body, we must provide a sport for every body. We must hasten to repair the split between body, mind and spirit. We must return athletics to their rightful place of honor in the arts and humanities. And, pursuing good health and all that it implies, we must expand our definition of what it means to be human.

For my way of thinking, it's a great moment to be in this

field. For I have no doubt that what we generally know as physical education, reformed and refurbished, can provide us the best possible path to personal enlightenment and social transformation in this age.